

**Sermon at S. Botolph's by Prof. William Horbury at the 11.00 a.m. Sung Eucharist on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, 18th January 2015**

(the last Sunday of his ministry as priest-in-charge).

(The sermon is reproduced with many thanks to choir, organist and congregation for a wonderful special service including Iain Cooper's setting of George Herbert's 'King of glory, king of peace'. The gradual psalm was 84, *Quam dilecta*, 'O how amiable are thy dwellings', and the hymns were 'Brightest and best', 'Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour', and 'The God of Abraham praise'. W.H.)

St John 2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

These words take us back to a time when stories of signs and wonders associated with Jesus have been listed in order — this is reckoned as the first — and linked with locations — in this case with Cana, a village on a hill about eight miles north of Nazareth, on the edge of still higher hills crowned by the town of Jotapata. This town was a strong point which the Romans had to besiege when they reconquered Galilee in the Jewish revolt about thirty-six or thirty-seven years after the wedding which Jesus, his mother and his disciples attended at Cana.

The gospel writers, like the Old Testament writers before them, are well aware that stories of signs and wonders are always ambiguous, and by themselves do not prove that anyone is a king or prophet. But in St John you see that these stories have not just been placed and listed, but have also been given an interpretation which keeps the ambiguities in mind: namely, that on these occasions, however they appeared to the general public, still, to the eye of faith, something significant was perceptible.

In this case that interpretation is focused first of all in the words attributed to the governor of the feast — French commentators call him the *maître*

d'hôtel — 'thou hast kept the good wine until now'. The words of the maître d'hôtel convey a sense of unexpected joy. For hearers or readers of St John's time they may have hinted specially at the joy of the whole mind and spirit imparted by the wine of the soul. So the Jewish philosopher Philo wrote that in Genesis, when Melchisedek the king of peace brings forth bread and wine to Abraham, he represents the divine word of God, giving to the soul the strong wine which produces a divine intoxication, a 'sober drunkenness'. For St John, comparably, the Jesus who gives the good wine at Cana is himself united with the eternal divine word — in the beginning was the word, and the word was made flesh, and we beheld the glory of the divine word.

That brings us to the second focus of the interpretation, the statement 'he manifested forth his glory' — the text from which we began; not that we or anyone could claim a full or unmediated experience of God, for as St John says 'no man hath seen God at any time', but that we can be granted, through all the limitations of our faculties, a mediated perception of the glory of the divine word. This is an interpretation from the ancient world, but it chimes in with modern emphases on experience as shaped above all by our faculties and capacities as human beings. We may be granted a mediated perception, a perception of the divine as mediated by the divine word through our limited capacities, a perception which, although it is only a glimpse, seen in St Paul's words 'through a glass, darkly', is still enough to overmaster us and make us drunk — even though its result is 'sober drunkenness', the full and joyful but totally controlled and directed exercise, to the glory of God, of the gifts that God has given us collectively, as St Paul says in to-day's Epistle [Romans 12:6-16]. One incidental advantage of the corporate uncertainty of our present situation at St Botolph's is perhaps that we find afresh all the gifts that we are given as a congregation, part of the whole church forming one body in Christ.

The perception of which St John speaks may come rarely in our individual experience, but we think in this connection not only of ourselves as individuals but also of the corporate experience of the whole church extended

through time and space. We share this experience above all through worship. Hence, as the psalm says [Ps. 84], 'My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh rejoice towards the living God' — a motion of entering in, moving towards, which is symbolized in church by our facing towards the sanctuary, towards the east, towards Jerusalem, towards (if we may put it so) the divine word and the divine name, joining, with the choir's help, in two human activities which have much in them of the divine: blessing — Benedicite! O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord — and thanksgiving — Sursum corda! let us give thanks unto our Lord God — in the spirit and fellowship of faith, hope, and charity.

**Speech by Michael Wilcockson**

**St Botolph's Church, Cambridge, 18th January 2015**

It is my very great honour and pleasure to say a few words on your behalf to thank William for his ministry at St Botolph's for a quarter of a century. It is probably true to say, William, that you must have sensed something was afoot to-day once the congregation began to swell a little beyond its usual Sunday morning gathering, but in truth for many of us — myself included — although we may not always be here in person, wherever we are, we are here in spirit. In fact when attending other church services it is very hard *not* to hear William's voice when another is reciting the collects, and William's special intonation of the Eucharistic prayer, and we feel that something is missing if it is not done as William does.

Well, to-day we *are* here in body and in spirit, because it is to you especially that we owe so much. We all know how special and diverse the Botolph's community is, because, true to its physical place at the old gate into Cambridge, the church still offers a refuge to travellers passing through, whether as tourists and visitors, or as those exploring their faith; whilst to

others it has become their permanent spiritual home. That inclusive diversity is how the Church of England should be, and we have had the good fortune to have a priest-in-charge through whose patronage this church has become an unobtrusively welcoming, non-judgmental and spiritual place which we have all come to love and appreciate.

Unless one knew otherwise anyone would imagine that William was a full-time priest-in-charge. For those who know, his time here is in addition to his busy life as a professor, fellow of Corpus, member of the Divinity Faculty, lecturer abroad and writer. So how has he managed to offer consistently for 25 years three services on Sunday and midweek worship all accompanied by sermons and homilies which constantly educate, challenge and engage with an extraordinary range of Christian thought, and yet are delivered with such lightness of touch?

Well, the answer is that William has a vocation and a vision of what a living Christian community is. Take for example the famous Botolph annual trips. For regular Sunday attendees it sometimes comes as a surprise to find a full coach setting off for the Suffolk coast or the gardens and house at Knole, Southwell Minster, Chichester, to name but a few. The Botolph trip devotee knows that these trips with frequent stops at coffee shops, pubs and restaurants, though not churchy affairs, do gently extend and practise Christian fellowship, but without affectation and fuss.

I know that many here to-day and others would want me to mention how William has given so generously of his time visiting members of the parish, counselling and comforting the sick and bereaved, leading Lenten study and preparing many for confirmation.

Over a quarter of a century society has changed considerably, and under William's pastorship St Botolph's has quietly adapted and flourished where many other ancient institutions have floundered and died. We know that your formal rôle with Botolph's, William, now comes to an end, but we very much hope that we shall continue to see you here for many years to come.

I'd therefore like to make two toasts. First, of course, to William: our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for 25 years' unstinting and loyal service.

But how could we not also thank Kathie Horbury? Kathie, thank you for so generously allowing William the time to devote himself to Botolph's. So, I ask you also to toast Kathie.

A member of the congregation has given as a memento a book which has been in the family for generations, on which William once preached a memorable sermon. It is *The Whole Duty of Man*. And Julia Barber has knitted for this occasion a green dragon. So I ask you, William, please to come forward and receive, with thanks from us all, these gifts.

### **Reply by William Horbury**

Although I've had my suspicions, as Michael says, they haven't run to anything like the scale of what you have all managed to accomplish in total secrecy — a wonderful occasion. As they say, it's not paranoia, people really are conspiring without your knowledge; but in this case, to a very happy and deeply appreciated outcome. The only disadvantage is that as I look round and see friends met originally at all stages of my life I can't help thinking of the drowning man, who goes down with all his life flashing before him in a moment of time. But I am saved from that by looking at these marvellous

presents. The *Whole Duty of Man* is undoubtedly what I need to keep me on the straight and narrow, if only I can live up to it. And the green dragon is something I have always wanted, as I've looked at Julia's creations on Visitors' Days, but have never had an excuse to get. I wish I had its fiery breath to express more adequately the warmth of my gratitude.

In the context of gratitude I'd like to name three past Rectors of S. Botolph's: Michael Carey, who with his wife Muriel welcomed Katharine and me into the congregation, and took me on in 1969 as his honorary assistant; his successor John Long and his wife Rosamund, who fostered so many fresh initiatives in S. Botolph's life (it's a particular pleasure to see here their daughter Margaret with her husband); and David Walser and his wife Elizabeth; he came to S. Botolph's with reluctance, but became much beloved.

Since David's resignation in 1989 the parish has had no incumbent, but from 1990 I've had the privilege of serving as priest-in-charge.

This would have been impossible without your support and friendship. I think of the present Churchwardens, Katharine and Tony, of three earlier Wardens — my old friend David Weigall, John Bates, and Alison Suter — of the P.C.C. and congregation, including many from past years. Time would fail me to name them all, and I must refer you for fuller accounts to members of the congregation of longer standing than me, Julia Barber and Nicholas and Joanna Barker. There's just time to mention one who was a particularly terse speaker, Roy Cossar, a pillar of the choir who meticulously kept a note of all the psalm-chants and hymn-tunes used each Sunday. One Saturday while we were at Gransden we came to the S. Botolph's Christmas Bazaar. Roy was at the door. 'How are you, Roy?' I asked. 'I'm on strike', he replied. Despite his notes, the same tune had been used, I think, on two successive Sundays. He soon ended his strike. When he died a few years later, he left S. Botolph's a generous legacy which enabled the P.C.C. to begin much-needed restoration work.

I can't forbear to mention the vital contribution made by our small but talented regular choir, and by the organists: Iain Cooper (conducting the choir this morning), followed by Paulina Taraskin, and then by Peter Harland and Andrew Morris (playing this morning). Moreover, how deeply I have valued assistance in the services and pastoral work given by two gifted members of the congregation who have successively trained here as Readers, Michael Wilcockson and Richard Howlett Jones, and by Margaret Widdess, who came to S. Botolph's on her ordination in 1997. Finally, I can't imagine what it would have been like to serve as priest-in-charge without my wife's encouragement and support. Perhaps I've been in a better position than anyone to see how much she does, how unobtrusively, for S. Botolph's. I am deeply grateful to you all.